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Stake your claim on Internet domain names

E-BIZ

JIM CARROLL

One of the most important things you should do for your small business is to reserve one or more Internet domain names.

A domain name is the identifier by which you are known on the Internet — it is what people type when they want to visit your Web site. It can incorporate the name of your company, your products or anything else — imagination is quickly becoming the rule. And you can have more than one name.

You may find that having a domain name based on words related to your business can increase online traffic to your Web site. I noticed from examining my Web server logs that many people found my site because they were searching for the phrase "speech topics," a line of business in which I am involved. I registered the domain speechtopics.com, and am drawing more visitors.

The first rule about domain names is to get one even if you don't expect to become actively involved with the Internet. If your plans change, the one you want may already be taken.

You will have to pay for each domain name you use — today, a minimum of $70 (U.S.) if you get one in the ".com" category. The money goes to a company that is authorized to allocate .com names. The fee is expected to drop in the next few months as its monopoly over such registration disappears.

You can register a domain name through your Internet service provider — the company that sells you access to the Internet or that hosts your Web site. It will usually charge you an additional fee for doing the paperwork.

But alternative methods of registering a domain name avoid this cost. For example, Easyhost (**www.easyhost.com**) allows you to do so for no cost other than the standard $70 fee.

Domain name registration services have emerged that allow you, rather than an Internet company, to manage your own domain name. EasyDNS (**www.easydns.com**) will let you create a domain name, and then indicate where the Web server for that domain name can be found, or where E-mail for the domain should be sent.

This can be important if you have a number of domain names or would like the flexibility of moving among Internet service providers or Web hosting companies.

Jim Carroll is co-author of Small Business Online — A Strategic Guide for Canadian Entrepreneurs, *and can be reached by E-mail at jcarroll@jimcarroll.com*